

**Rep. Mike Gallagher (WI-08) Testimony Before the Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies**

Madam Chair, Ranking Member Joyce, thank you for the opportunity to address this subcommittee and in particular for your leadership on behalf of the Great Lakes. I know you and many others on this subcommittee have been tireless advocates for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, so while I know I will not be saying anything new today, please bear with me as I spend a bit of time explaining about why I believe this critical program is so important to northeast Wisconsin and beyond.

Anyone who's visited the Great Lakes knows they are a national treasure. They not only hold over 20% of the world's fresh water supply, but support thousands of family-sustaining jobs. Industries from agriculture, to transportation, and tourism depend on the health and preservation of these waters. However, these lakes provide for more than just our economy. They provide for a way of life. Lake Michigan is the backyard of my district. From swimming and boating in the summer, to ice fishing in the bitter cold winter, Lake Michigan provides countless hours of enjoyment and has a special place in the lives of northeast Wisconsinites.

Given the central role Lake Michigan plays in our community, it should be no surprise that Wisconsinites are passionate about the health of our waters. We do not take threats to our ecosystem lightly. We know all too well that when agricultural runoff or chemicals contaminate the waters, they make our lakes susceptible to toxic algae outbreaks, which not only damage our ecosystem, but our way of life.

GLRI dollars support projects to counter these threats. In northeast Wisconsin, we've seen firsthand how successful these projects can be. For example, the Fox River fell victim to

side effects from the paper manufacturing industry boom. PCBs, toxic chemicals used in the paper industry from 1954-1971, devastated the river and the economies that it supported. Today, the Fox River is still considered a GLRI area of concern, but because of these dollars and the projects they support, we hope to complete the Fox River clean-up next year. This is a landmark achievement for northeast Wisconsin and is just one of many examples that highlight the significance of GLRI to our waters and communities.

While we have made progress, we cannot reverse course. Eliminating or reducing funding for GLRI would undo years of this program's achievements and will create extreme uncertainty for the future health of our waters. At a time when we see new contaminants like PFAS threatening our rivers, streams, and lakes, the stakes are too high to abandon a program that helps safeguard our natural resources. What's reassuring to me is that even amidst calls for cuts to the GLRI, there is bipartisan support for this important initiative, and I am proud to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to lead the way for continued support of GLRI funding. As we look to the future, we must consider how we can build on our GLRI investments. Since GLRI funding has been flat at \$300 million since 2014, this year, I urge the subcommittee to include *at least* \$300 million in FY 2020. It is an important investment that my constituents and the health of our waters depend on, and I appreciate your full consideration.

Thank you.

Staff POC: Maggie Woodin, 414-828-0306